

Scripture Reading: Genesis 48

“8 Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons, and said, “Who are these?” 9 And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place.” And he said, “Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.” 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, “I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!” 12 So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near him. 14 Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, 16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” 17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.” 19 But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’” And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

"Jacob Blesses Joseph's Children"

With these closing chapters on the story of Jacob here in Genesis, we are striving to focus on some important lessons for us today:

- Last week we saw a return to the foundations of hope that were laid in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- This week and next, we will find Jacob living in hope as he adds to his twelve sons and blesses them all!
- AND finally we will see hope for the future as the bones of both Jacob and Joseph are laid to rest as they await the final resurrection!

As we study these lessons from the Book of Beginnings, it should be very easy once again to see our Savior Jesus here in the pages of the Old Testament!

We know and will be reminded that:

- Jesus is our Rock, or foundation!
- Jesus is our Life, or living hope!
- And yes,
Jesus is our only hope for the future!

So, with that in mind let us dig into our text for this morning:

Joseph has been told that his father is very ill and close to death and so he visits him with his two sons.

And after Jacob rejoices in his reunion with Joseph he turns to the boys at his side:

“8 Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons, and said, “Who are these?” 9 And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place.”

Last week we saw Jacob naming these two sons and adopting them as his own so they would become a part of the twelve tribes of Israel.

- **We are also told that Jacob’s vision is failing and yet he knew the boys were there and what blessings he intended to give them!**

“And he said, “Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.” 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them.”

- **Thus, the family reunion of sorts continues with Jacob showing the affection of a grandfather and he rejoices in this moment:**

“11 And Israel said to Joseph, “I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!”

- **As is often the case, God has blessed Jacob above what he could have thought or imagined!**

Jacob would have been content in just knowing that his favored son was alive after thinking he was dead for so many years!

- **And yet now he has spent 17 years with him here in Egypt and seen his grandchildren.**

Joseph then presents his sons for their formal blessing and carefully positions the eldest to receive the greater honor: Joseph knows how things should be done, as would Jacob, but the man whose eyes have grown dim is being guided by the Spirit of God and we need to pay careful attention to what happens to see how this relates to the work of Jesus in saving His people from their sins!

“12 So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near him.”

We are reminded that the greater blessing is conferred by the right hand to the eldest son!

- **It is also important to remember the principle of the double-portion for the first born as we consider the actions by Joseph and his father.**

We find this discussed in the Law of God at Deuteronomy 21: 15

““If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, 16 then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. 17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.”

While this type of inheritance in families might appear to be an obscure theme in the Scriptures, we do see the principle of double blessing or double judgment when it comes to how God deals with our sin...

Consider the promise that God’s people are given by the Prophet Isaiah where we find double honor and double blessing: And I want to read the full context because yes, this is in fact the Scripture that Jesus read at the beginning of His earthly ministry. We read in Luke chapter four that Jesus visits a synagogue, and after reading a portion of Isaiah He closes the scroll and sits down. And after a pregnant pause, Jesus declares: ““Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

OK kids, time for your test...

- **When Jesus says ‘today’ what do you think he means?**

So, now let us go back to the place in Isaiah that Jesus read from & see what He said would be fulfilled in that day...

Isaiah 61: ““The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,...”

- **Jesus ended His quote here but the prophet goes on to explain more details which bring us to the double blessing... All describing the work of Jesus!**

“And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” 4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. 5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner Shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. 6 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, *[priesthood of all believers from camp]* They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast. 7 Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.” Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs.”

Here at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus is making it clear that the angels meant what they sang at His birth:

- **His coming would bring joy to the world as salvation went to the Gentiles, to all the nations!**

Jesus went on to explain the impact of this truth, giving examples of God’s Grace being given to Gentiles in the Old Testament: The widow given oil and bread by Elijah and NA-a-man the Syrian healed by Elisha... And rather than rejoicing in the glory now promised to the Gentiles, God’s own hard-hearted people rejected their own Messiah from the very beginning as Luke tells us at verse 28:

“So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.”

So rather than rightly reading Isaiah or hearing Jesus, they chose to remain in their prideful sin and not find double blessing but rather would face double judgment as the prophet Jeremiah had warned them about long ago:

Jeremiah 16: “17 For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes. 18 And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable idols.”

So this brings us back to our text and why Joseph is careful to place his eldest son Manasseh in front of Jacob’s right hand for the greater blessing.

- **As with many principles that we find in the Law of God, it obviously carries much greater meaning than just who gets how much earthly stuff!**

And now I hope we can see why it is so important to notice that the man whose physical eyes had failed could still see with the eye of faith and blessed these boys as the Lord intended...

“14 Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn.”

Now we are going to see that this concerned Joseph, but it should not surprise us today when we have the whole Canon of Scripture before us because the blessing going to the younger is a regular occurrence which I would argue represents a major part of God's redemptive plans! Those examples abound when we consider Abel being favored over the elder Cain, the younger son of Noah Seth put in the line of promise over Japheth, Abraham chosen over the older Haran, of course Issac over Ismael & Jacob over Esau and now Ephraim over Manasseh. Next week we will see Judah blessed over firstborn Reuben and later examples in the Bible would include Moses over Aaron, and David over all his brothers.

- Another reminder that Kingdom priorities always trump family priorities.
- It also relates to the regular theme that we see in the New Testament about the first being last and the last first as we shall see in a moment.

Going back to the event in our text: "14 Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn."

15 And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, 16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

- In blessing his two boys, Jacob is blessing his son Joseph as he places them among the other brothers as his own sons!

However, for the moment Joseph is acting as a father and wants the proper blessing to go to the proper son...

"17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

We can debate whether Joseph thought his father was being intentional or was just mixed up because of his poor eye sight, but Jacob stands his ground:

"19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Jacob puts Joseph's mind at ease with the assurance that both boys will be heads of the tribes of Israel, but the younger would serve the older, a pattern that we saw occurring often in the Scriptures which relates directly to what Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of His ministry...

- And impacts us directly today as we carry out the Great Commission.

But first, here is the blessings given by Jacob:

"20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh."

- God had promised Abraham that his heirs would grow into a mighty nation while in Egypt. This nation would have twelve tribes along with the priestly tribe of Levi.

We will see more details on this when Jacob blesses his other sons next week... But for now remember that Ephraim and Manasseh are the double blessing for Joseph and that the younger Ephraim would be the greater tribe. We see this clearly in the census numbers as they had 8,000 more fighting men at the Exodus and this tribe was very dominant, though not always in a good way, in the Northern Kingdom when Israel was divided.

- So let me try and put all of this together and see how it impacts us today!

Remember that we are between the lesson about proper foundations and the upcoming one on the future. So what we are considering is how our lives are to be lived in the here and now...

- The work of Jesus is the only foundation of our salvation, and the power of His resurrection is our only hope for the future...
- But in the here and now He calls us to right living as we carry out the Great Commission.

I think we can see the importance of this portion of Genesis when we consider how some of the ancient Church Fathers saw Jacob's actions.

Now I have to admit, that when I first read them I thought it was a bit of a stretch, but when you relate it to how Jesus began His ministry I think they are on to something profound.

We go back to the scene where Jacob crosses his arms in order to give the blessings he wanted to give to the proper sons...

- The ancients saw in this nothing less than the cross of Christ!

Now of course crossed arms can certainly be seen as an allegory for the cross of Christ, but is this a stretch?

I have come to see that it is very appropriate when we consider what this crossing was doing...

Jacob was conferring the double blessing on the youngest son and then assuring Joseph that there would be a future for the oldest as well.

Now go back and think about the point that Jesus was making in that synagogue as He began His earthly ministry: The point that brought forth wrath from God's people! Those same people that Jesus would weep over as He entered Jerusalem some years later to finish His work.

- They were upset because Jesus was pointing out that the Gentiles would be blessed by His work and those proud religious leaders wanted no part of that thought or concept.
- Just as we see in the eldest son in the parable of the prodigal son, they are angry with their Father!

What I think we have to understand is that at the cross, the double blessing that rightly belongs to an eldest, the Nation of Israel, is there transferred to the younger son the Gentiles!

As the Apostle Paul carefully points out in those challenging chapters at Roman 9-11, the natural branches are not cast off forever, they can be put back into the tree...

- But in reality, and the wisdom of God's plan of salvation, their jealousy and rejection of the Messiah was used by God to bring in the fullness of the Gentiles!

We saw this very clearly at the end of the Book of Acts and it is a scene that is hauntingly similar to that first encounter that Jesus had in the Synagogue: The truth that Jacob is demonstrating by the reversed blessing is seen at the beginning and end of the histories given in the New Testament!

Acts 28: "23 So when [the Jews in Rome] had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved."

Paul quotes from Isaiah regarding hardened hearts and then declares:

“28 “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. [just as they had back in Capernaum in that Synagogue]

**30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,
31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”**

And thus what was a priority for the Apostle Paul must also be our priority as we consider how we are to live in the power of the Holy Spirit remembering the lessons we are learning here at the end of Genesis...

- We want our lives built on the only proper foundation:
The Finished Work of Jesus!**
- We want to live our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit because it is Christ Who lives in us!**
- And we want to look forward to the hope of the resurrection when the last enemy, death will be defeated!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23

“The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name’s sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil;

For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life;

And I will dwell[a] in the house of the Lord

Forever.”